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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: GOS DENIES SHIFT IN CHINA ARMS EMBARGO POLICY

Classified By: DCM Bob Manzanares; reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C) Summary. Spanish media reported that President Zapatero expressed support for a lifting of the EU China arms embargo during an official visit to China. DCM spoke with Deputy FM Bernardino Leon and with MOD Chief of Staff Miguel Fernandez Palacio to convey the sensitivity of this issue for the USG and to request a clarification of Spanish policy towards the China arms embargo. Deputy FM Leon insisted that Zapatero's comments were taken out of context and that Spanish policy remained to work with EU partners towards a lifting of the arms embargo, but only with strict application of the Code of Conduct and only after China gave positive signals on human rights. DCM made clear continued USG opposition to the lifting of the arms embargo and said this episode had not been helpful to bilateral relations. Leon offered to contact EUR A/S Fried to explain the context surrounding Zapatero's statements. End Summary.

2. (U) On July 21 and July 22, Spanish media sources covering President Zapatero's visit to China reported that Zapatero had expressed support for the lifting of the EU China arms embargo. Zapatero said the sanctions should be lifted when the EU reaches agreement on the Code of Conduct governing EU member weapons sales to China. Zapatero reiterated this position during a July 22 press conference with Chinese President Hu Jintao, saying the EU embargo should be ended "sooner rather than later," within the framework of the Code of Conduct. In the same press conference, Zapatero said "There is no democracy if there is no rule of law.... It is important that the process of reform be carried out in accordance with the identity of China, its history, and its culture." Asked by reporters whether he thought his position on the arms embargo would irk the USG, Zapatero responded that he was acting within a common EU position and therefore did not believe his statements would produce bilateral tensions with the USG.

3. (C) Miguel Fernandez Palacio, Chief of Staff to Minister of Defense Jose Bono, told DCM on July 21 that Bono (who publicly opposed a lifting of the China arms embargo) knew this was a sensitive issue for the USG. Palacio said Bono had contacted FM Moratinos to complain about what appeared to be a shift in Spanish policy. Moratinos reportedly assured Bono that there had been no change and that Spain only supported a lifting of the arms embargo within the EU Code of Conduct and only after the Chinese government demonstrated a willingness to improve human rights conditions.

4. (C) Palacio's comments mirrored the explanation by Carlos Fernandez Arias, adviser to MFA DG for Foreign Policy Rafael Dezcallar, when asked for clarification regarding Spain's position on the lifting of the arms embargo. Arias said the arms embargo was an "anachronism" at a time when U.S. arms sales to China exceeded those of the EU and when the EU only maintained similar bans on nations such as North Korea, Burma, and Zimbabwe. However, Arias insisted that Spain was not out in front of its EU partners and would only agree to a lifting of the ban once China gave a clear signal of intent to improve human rights conditions.

5. (C) When Zapatero was again cited on July 22 supporting a lifting of the EU arms embargo on China, without any explicit caveats regarding advances on human rights, DCM contacted Deputy FM Leon to request clarification of Spanish policy. Leon was adamant that Zapatero's words had been taken out of context by reporters accompanying him and said Moratinos was furious with media coverage of Zapatero's remarks. Leon said Zapatero had stuck closely to EU positions on the China arms embargo and that he (Leon) was endeavoring to obtain a transcript of Zapatero's comments in order to relay them to the Embassy. DCM underscored the sensitivity of the China arms embargo issue for the USG and said this episode had not been helpful for bilateral relations. Leon offered to contact EUR A/S Fried to explain the context of Zapatero's statements. DCM said that what would be most useful would be as complete a record as possible of Zapatero's statements in Beijing.

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